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A COMPARISON OF SOME CONDITIONS IN JAMAICA WITH THOSE IN THE UNITED STATES

By Charles K. Needham

The present writer, a native of Kentucky and born in 1848, can look back upon the conditions of slavery as they once existed. His business life as a civil engineer has been passed in his own state, in Tennessee, Georgia and all the Gulf States east of the Mississippi River; he is therefore somewhat familiar with the present social condition of the descendants of former slaves. During the past three winters he has spent a portion of his time in the West Indies and on the Isthmus of Panama; his second winter in Jamaica terminated in March, 1913.

If any one interested in Jamaica will turn to an index of periodical literature he will find a variety of articles mentioned, some of which relate to its scenery and others to its social life. On reading farther under this latter class he will notice that nearly all the writers say directly or by implication that English methods of government, as applied in Jamaica, have been more successful in managing the colored people than American methods in the southern part of the United States. It is not the purpose of this article to deny such a statement, but rather to explain the difference as due to some other cause than hatred or opposition on the part of white men in the South. The goal toward which Jamaica seems to be tending is so different from that which lies before the southern part of the United States—to say nothing of Jamaica's climatic and insular situation—that there is really little or nothing which could be copied by the people of the southern states to the practical advantage of the colored people around them. To make this more apparent than by a mere statement is the design of the present writer.

Let us first glance at social conditions in Jamaica as they are at present. The word "coloured" is used in Jamaica to denote the class which has a mingled racial ancestry. The pure blacks are described by that adjective, or by the words negro or dark, without connoting any idea of inferiority. Hence the word "colored" (American spelling) loses its significance when transferred to Jamaica. But in time some other word must be introduced, because the Chinese and the East India coolies have progeny in the British West Indies, and they can justly claim from etymology the word coloured as applicable to them.

Democracy has never found a lodgment in Jamaica, nor is there any probability that it will ever be acceptable. The inhabitants are divided into three classes which are comparable, except as to numbers, to the three classes existing in England. The pure whites correspond to the aristocracy; the "coloured" (the English spelling is used purposely) are in a social sense relatively like the English middle class; the darks or blacks—meaning those who have no evidence of white ancestry—are the laboring or peasant class. These three mingle freely in many of the affairs of life, but in certain other matters there is a distinction well recognized by an individual when coming in contact with one who is his social superior. Any American who has resided in England can hardly fail to observe the similarity if he goes about in Jamaica. And this result is natural when we consider the close ties with which Jamaica has been bound to the mother country. The white men have ever been loyal, even going so far as to spurn at times any commercial connection with the United States, and their children—whether the mothers have been of Saxon or African ancestry—have been taught to "honour the King" and to accept without question the teaching of the catechism "to order myself lowly and reverently to all my betters." As an evidence that much of this latter precept has found lodgment in their minds, the American tourist notices not only a difference of dialect among the "coloured" people when compared with American English, but also a respectful manner in language and in behavior which is free of

obsequiousness. At first intercourse, the Jamaican can not tell from the pronunciation of the tourist whether he is from Canada or the United States; when, later, the intelligent coloured persons learn that a tourist from former slave states can adapt himself to various Jamaicans and give no offense, they are led to raise doubts concerning many reports of bad feeling in the United States toward any one with African blood.

No American tourist can have much intercourse with the great majority of the blacks, because they speak a dialect wholly unintelligible. Of course there is no connection between the color of the skin and the sort of spoken language. The foundation of the difference between the coloured or middle class and the blacks below them is in the fact that the former have been helped by their fathers or grandfathers to get some degree of education, and that in their early home surroundings they have listened to better language than the full blacks. Furthermore, many of them have inherited property and show an ability to add to it. In every part of the world the rule holds good that for racial development a certain degree of financial sense is requisite. As early as in 1734 it was not uncommon for English planters to set free their own offspring, and a considerable amount of property was often left to them; and as this was kept oftentimes with all the tenacity which English people manifest for landed estates, it can be readily understood that many of their present-day descendants are at least in comfortable circumstances.

The similarity of the coloured people of Jamaica to the middle class of England is also noticed now and then in an individual case when a person falls below or rises above the class into which he is born. A man whose natural color is on the border line between the coloured and the dark may marry a full black woman, and find all his future intimate friends among those who are the equal of his wife; nearly all of his children will be darker in color than their father, and later descendants will probably intermarry in the lower class. On the other hand, an intelligent and well featured young woman, who would be classed in Louisiana

as an octoroon, may marry some unattached young Englishman who has come to Jamaica and finds the business prospects of the country satisfactory. If the young woman also has money by inheritance in cash, houses or lands, the young man's choice in selecting his bride is well understood by his associates, and his wife is received by white ladies according to the social qualities which she actually possesses, and not by the color of her skin. Yet it does not follow that the children of such a union will remain in the class to which their father belongs by birth. As every observer of racial mixture knows, there is a strong atavistic potency in the negro race which is extremely hard to eradicate. There are many comely young women with one-eighth or less of African blood who show nothing in hair or face of their tropical origin, but in their children—even with a white father—the nose, the lips or the hair may have the peculiar form that we associate with a native of Senegambia. When such a child appears in the Jamaican upper class—let the skin be ever so irreproachable in color—that individual is almost doomed to step down when he or she settles under a roof separate from the parents. Of course all such obstacles are sometimes counterbalanced when an abundant dowry is provided; but we are now considering only general rules.

The tendency of the coloured people to mingle with the class below is far more active than the opportunity to rise into the class above. On this point nothing is better than a quotation from de Lisser.¹

There is a considerable element of the Jamaica population which is known as "sambo," an element with about one-fourth of white blood; this Caucasian or Semitic mixture shows itself plainly in their colour or their features, and they should, strictly speaking, be classed as "coloured." But very few members of this section of the people have so classified themselves in the census. I instituted an inquiry which embraced a very large number of persons, immediately after the census was published. I found that almost every person I could reach, who had at least one-fourth of white blood in his or her veins, had been set down in the census as

¹ de Lisser, H. G., *Twentieth Century Jamaica*, page 44. The Jamaica Times, Ltd., Kingston, 1913.

black, the term coloured having by custom come to be applied to persons of a distinctly brown or clear complexion.

The fact is interesting. For it shows that the number of mixed-blood people in the colony is larger than the census states, very much larger; it shows that race mixture has been going on more extensively than many students have believed.

The probabilities are that a large proportion of the people are still pure-blooded. But I should not hesitate to say that at least three hundred thousand, or over one-third, of the present population are of mixed blood, however slightly; and if any one should now assert that the proportion is greater, I should not be inclined to contradict him. The old theory was that the coloured section of the West Indies could not reproduce its kind except by mating with pure white or pure black. That theory (never accepted by any scientist of repute) has now gone by the board. But the coloured people of Jamaica have not only increased by intermarriage among themselves, but by intermarriage among the whites and the blacks, and also by the intermarriage of the whites and the blacks. The inevitable result has been their rapid multiplication; they are increasing faster than any other element of the population. Will they continue to do so? That the vast majority of the people will always be dark is indisputable; there are economic as well as other reasons for this. But that they will always be pure-blooded is an assertion open to some question. The time may come when, in the towns, there will be hardly one person of pure African descent.

To put the case somewhat mathematically, we may take figures from the census of April, 1911, when the total inhabitants were as follows:

		per cent
White.....	15,605	1.88
Coloured.....	163,201	19.63
Black.....	630,181	75.80
East Indians.....	17,380	2.09
Chinese.....	2,111	0.25
Not specified.....	2,905	0.35
	<hr/> 831,383	<hr/> 100.00

Accepting all that Mr. de Lisser says in respect to the blending of the coloured into the blacks, there is also reason to believe that the census enumerators put down as white quite a number who had a small proportion of African blood. This is unavoidable in a country where so many Europeans become "tanned" from exposure to the sun. A phrase is current in Jamaica, "white by law," which is the outgrowth of legislation some years ago, when the house of assembly

allowed persons with more than three-fourths of white blood to have the rights and privileges of white men. But to have certain privileges "by law" does not mean to have *all* privileges, and especially not to be enumerated as white by the census clerk after passing the quadroon stage. We can well assume that the government gave such instructions to the census officials in the field that the test for being classified as white was not in conformity with any rigid fraction, for upon that basis many individuals were so ignorant of their own genealogy that they could not give truthful and reliable answers.

The people are learning, however, that merely a color of the skin is not sufficient to determine a man's true worth. Every now and then an individual is born in the dark class whose early surroundings are of the primitive kind, yet nature gives to him a strong will, far superior to that of his parents, a healthy body and a brain which rapidly and permanently absorbs many sorts of knowledge. There are in Jamaica a number of endowed institutions which will help such a youth with personal guidance and with financial assistance. He rises just as many a poor boy in the United States rises "from a dung hill," and he can attain to the middle class in Jamaica in spite of his dark skin. To counterbalance such progress, there are numerous instances of coloured persons who fall into bad habits—for one reason because they are mentally inert and lazy—and who then find poverty less oppressive in the lowest class; into that class they naturally fall. To describe the middle class somewhat metaphorically: there is a well defined middle line for it so far as color is concerned, but on each side it blends with colors that are darker or lighter, as the case may be, very much like the colors of a rainbow.

The editor of the census of 1911 points out that "the number of coloured people has increased in greater proportion, and the number of black people in a slightly less proportion than the total increase of the people." Just how this is to be explained he does not attempt to show. The intelligent people of Jamaica do not believe the census is much at fault, although many think with Mr. de Lisser

that the figures in respect to the number of coloured people are too small. At any rate there seems to be no doubt, when comparing one census with another, that the coloured or middle class is steadily increasing.

The present writer is not prepared to give a complete answer to the natural question: how is the middle class kept up or caused to increase so far as its color is concerned? The great majority are the progeny of coloured parents who were legitimately married and have brought up their children essentially like the members of the middle class in England. Infant mortality is, of course, lower among them than among the blacks, because they are able to provide better hygienic surroundings. Out in the country it is not uncommon to find a white man married to a woman of mixed ancestry, for the same reason that white men go to Oklahoma and marry squaws or half-breed girls. Then again, there are, no doubt, a number of illegitimate children whose fathers are white men; especially is this the case in the larger cities, but reliable statistics on such a matter are, of course, impossible to obtain.

Less space need be given to a description of the blacks. They are poor, ignorant, untrained to anything beyond the crudest manual labor, and are but little removed from their African progenitors. Their language is so far from standard English that it is impossible for an American to mix much with them and thus learn about them at first hand. They are, as a class, less advanced in civilization than the average of field laborers in the United States. The present writer knows something of them by observation and by conversation with a number of coloured people; he lodged with the middle class last winter in various parts of the island and mingled freely with them. The preponderating number of the blacks, with their indifference to progress, acts as an incubus on the economic advancement of Jamaica. Some years ago, after much discussion by the intelligent taxpayers, the Government resolved to introduce a system of public schools similar to those in the United States, and to make attendance upon them obligatory for all children up to fourteen years of age. As Jamaica is already pretty

well loaded with taxes for other purposes, the equipment for these elementary schools is not first class, nor is the allowance for salaries sufficient to engage the services of well trained teachers. Immediate results from this system of free schools is not expected by any one, and the future will determine whether the next generation can show mental and moral improvement commensurate with the expense upon the public chest.

Meanwhile, "continuation" schools and colleges, maintained in large measure by tuition fees, will have pupils as heretofore from homes where parents are in better financial circumstances than members of the lowest class, and their children, who are for the most part coloured, will make greater intellectual progress than those who cease to attend school at fourteen years of age. Leaving exceptional individuals out of account, it is probable that the introduction of free schools will have no obliterating effect upon the lines of class distinction. All three classes may mingle in the school-room and at play for about eight years, and thus learn to note the good and bad qualities that show forth in all boys and girls. And in after years, when their paths in life have led them far apart, although some of them will have a recognized social and mental superiority, there will not be the same feeling of aloofness that existed in the minds of their grandparents; to that extent the free schools may be a benefit.

But the real value of democracy is not to be found in the years of childhood and adolescence; the test comes rather among adults and voters. Here we meet in Jamaica a status of affairs which is not duplicated in the United States: namely, the property qualification or the ability to earn a certain income. Any man, who is not an alien in Jamaica, on paying a tax of at least ten shillings (not license fees) is placed by the proper clerk on the registration list of voters; and any man without taxable property, but who can show that his yearly income is as much as £50—whether in payment of services or from investments or gifts—can also demand, by proper legal papers, that his name be placed among those entitled to vote. Practically

all that are entitled to vote do not vote, and at the same time the great mass of the blacks are not eligible, notwithstanding the low limit of £50 income. The people elect fourteen members to the legislative council, and the crown appoints fifteen members with the understanding that they are, in general, to support the governor in his views upon any legislative measure; and these fifteen members *must* give their support to any directions that come to them from the colonial secretary in London. For a full understanding of the political organization of Jamaica the reader is referred to Mr. de Lisser's book already mentioned. Sufficient has been given above to show that the form of government in the United States differs radically from what is found in a British colony; consequently, political methods and privileges that work well in the West Indies could not be imitated in one of the states.

The proportionate number of white men in the southern states far exceeds the number found in Jamaica, and they are permanent residents, whereas many of the whites in Jamaica are occupying commercial positions which they expect to abandon after a stated period. If certain offices in a British crown colony are given to persons with African ancestry it is because a sufficient number of white men are not applicants, and because the coloured man has been tested during a number of years and was promoted by slow degrees. Is there any opportunity to apply that principle in South Carolina or Mississippi? Again, the number of elective offices in the states is far greater than in Jamaica; in fact the voters are done when they choose their fourteen representatives once in five years. The heads of departments hold their positions for life or good behavior, and are selected by the government from subordinates, all of whom serve under civil service rules. Is there any probability that this system will be introduced into any state, county or municipality in the United States?

In the maintenance of order and in the punishment of crime, Jamaica certainly has something to her credit in comparison with most of the southern states. First, there is an admirable system of roads located and mapped by

experts, some of whom, before the year 1670, were Spaniards; and these roads are kept, for the most part, in good condition, notwithstanding the soft limestone that is, generally, the only available material for a macadam covering. Negro women are glad to gather and break this stone by hand, and to be paid for it by measurement at a rate that yields on an average 25 cents per day. Second in aid to the maintenance of order, there is an excellent police organization, regulated like an army by officers who have been trained in the British Isles across the Atlantic. Their black subordinates are obtained by a sifting process, and the successful ones are glad to give their best years in the service of the government at low salaries, knowing that they will be pensioned if disabled in the performance of duty or by reason of old age. The constabulary force of Pennsylvania comes nearer to the police of Jamaica than any state body of officials. But in none of our mountainous southern states, similar in topography to Jamaica, is there an approach to the splendid system of wagon roads and the permanent body of men who can be immediately summoned to enforce obedience to the law or to suppress disorder. The promptness with which petty crimes are punished—the offender having little chance of escape after the police are notified—is one reason why greater crimes are rarely attempted. The people of the southern states could vastly improve their judiciary and their legal methods of punishing crime without large expenditure of money, but they are not prepared to build roads by taxation or to maintain such a good system of police as the British government insists upon having in all its colonies: for one reason, good men to serve on the police can not be obtained at any thing like the small price which is paid in the West Indies. Furthermore, in comparing the two regions we must remember that the insular form of Jamaica makes the escape of a criminal much more difficult than in the United States.

The present writer made the acquaintance of several police inspectors in Kingston, and attended the sessions of the court, besides visiting the general penitentiary. The prisons are full, and many of the inmates seem to prefer

the comforts of their cells to the accommodations of miserable shacks that would otherwise be their homes. The prevalent crime is larceny, just as it is in the southern states of the Union. Were it not for the opposition of the British cabinet, the authorities in Jamaica would probably introduce a system of corporal punishment for stealing. It is undoubtedly a good deterrent for a confirmed criminal, and, if an adult negro is no more than a child in his moral perceptions, he should be governed and controlled as a child. The southern states can set the example for Jamaica in this matter, as they are not under distant advisers with veto power.

The most serious accusation brought against the southern people is in relation to their mode of punishment for the crime of rape. Because the rape of a white woman is unknown in Jamaica, the inference is drawn that the white people in the southern states are to blame for its occurrence among them, the negro character in both regions being essentially the same. Men who are not familiar with social conditions below Mason and Dixon's line do not hesitate to assert that the rape of white women is the natural outcome of a revengeful feeling, since white men are continually forcing colored women in a similar manner, and the police fail to take notice of it even as a misdemeanor. Others again believe it is because the negro is deprived of the right of suffrage to which under the fifteenth amendment of the constitution he is entitled, and, like the militant suffragettes in England, he uses violent means to show his displeasure. Many other explanations equally absurd have appeared in print, all of them coming from men who have never studied the question on the ground.

The fallacy in trying to connect the crime of rape with deprivation of suffrage is evident when we remember that in Maryland and Kentucky, where the "grandfather clause" is inoperative, there are as many assaults upon white women—in proportion to the number of negroes—as in more southern states. The negro who believes that he is arbitrarily deprived of registration, or that his vote is not really counted, is usually too intelligent to attempt a criminal

assault. Equally insufficient is the argument that revenge for similar violence on the part of white men is the motive which impels a negro to subject an unwilling woman to the most humiliating experience that it is possible to imagine. The colored women are not forced in these days to accept the approaches of a white man. He who will look but a little upon the seamy side of life in Louisiana and in Jamaica will see enough to convince him that the number of colored women who have intimate relations with white men is far larger than it should be. The few negro men in the United States who have had a trial for rape did not urge in extenuation that a sister, wife or other female relative had been subjected to any indignity by white men; least of all were these rapists able to show that the male relatives of their victims had ever done harm to the self-appointed avenger. No; the root of the difficulty is to be found in the base, sensual nature of the negro whose sexual appetite is, at periods, so strong—either by nature or by repeated indulgence in the past—that it overcomes his reason. Rape does not occur in Jamaica because there are many black women with whom the brutish negro can have companionship. It is a hilly country where every Jack can have his Jill, and where many neglect to go to a clergyman or a magistrate before living together. The present writer would not be understood as defaming the lowest class in Jamaica, and indirectly elevating the negro women in his own country. He can not, for the sake of decency, expand his views on this subject even in a periodical intended to be read by adults, nor is it necessary to repeat what has been well said elsewhere in the accounts of African explorers respecting the sexual life of negroes, and in journals devoted to ethnic and criminal anthropology. Certain physiological realities must be faced fearlessly by a man who desires to pass an unprejudiced judgment on the subject of rape. The alleged reason for its non-occurrence in Jamaica is here presented after more than fifty years of observation of male negroes under a variety of circumstances, after tours on foot in various parts of the island when the domestic conditions of the low class of blacks could be seen, after re-

stricted observation at night, and after conversation with police officials (white men) who have been in Jamaica a number of years.

No doubt the superiority of the police force and the excellent code of practice in the courts are collectively of great help in making Jamaica a safer place for white women than Mississippi. And this is said with full knowledge that the island contains a region—the cockpit, unexplored and inhabited by maroons—to which a criminal might flee. If a black man in Jamaica should deliberately plan to assault a white woman, he might also arrange to escape to this class of blacks who are left to themselves by the government. They, however, in all probability would give him up when the crime had been explained to them, in order to maintain their present independent condition; but if they refused, a mounted force would be sent into their country, just as the English went into Abyssinia and Egypt some years ago, and if the criminal were found and identified, there is no doubt he would be punished in a way to strike terror in the minds of all evil doers. The spirit which manifested itself at the close of the Sepoy rebellion in India has not died out in the minds of the present white rulers of Jamaica, and black men are convinced of this by their experience with minor breaches of law.

Aside from all physiological or psychological reasons for the crime now under consideration, we should consider the sudden change in the United States from slavery to a nominal democracy which is implied in some of the laws and customs, and which the half-educated negro wishes to enforce or extend. In Jamaica this has not been the case. Slavery was abolished more gradually, and the history of the development of the blacks shows that British administrators were in no hurry to bring them up to a level with white people. For the ignorant blacks of Jamaica a white woman is nearly the embodiment of the distant Queen, towards whom they were taught to have almost a divine affection, since it was by the action of London officials—of whom the Queen is the head—that they were set free. The negro in America learns nothing of that kind in study-

ing the history of his own country. There is more in it to make him resentful and discontented than to encourage him to work hard and save his money. He fails to learn that he must follow the example of the successful emigrant who begins with nothing but strong, untrained hands.

The criminal negro in America, like all others of his class often combines the animus of a daredevil with that of a parasite. Knowing the paucity and inefficiency of the police power in the community where he lives, he ventures his life in a game with the sheriff's deputies, with much the same spirit that prompts the gambler to play at high stakes. The law-abiding citizens do not wish to incur the expense of maintaining a body of men in uniform, as in Jamaica, who shall keep desperadoes in awe. In the sparsely settled districts of the South the men would rather organize a vigilance committee when serious crime occurs, and, with the help of bloodhounds, chase the fleeing perpetrator. If they find the fugitive they do not hesitate to put an end to his existence when the case is clear, and when his former life has been tainted with minor crimes. Can we blame them when the customary methods in a court house are so slow and faulty; and specially following the crime of rape, when the principal witness must be subjected to a second agony on the stand, even in a trial with closed doors? It is to avoid this exposure of shame before twelve strange men that jails are stormed in order to lynch a man whom more than twelve men believe to be guilty.

In Jamaica the source of authority is well defined by a succession of individuals from the inspector to the governor sent out from England. All these men are appointed, not elected or changed every few years. They are trained to do certain things as a life work, and they hope to advance by their merits rather than by favoritism or by the results at the polls. These fundamental differences in the form of government, when we compare Florida, for instance, with Jamaica, account for much of the difference in results when dealing with a backward race which, when left to itself, could never maintain a limited monarchy, much less a republic.

The unstable and oppressive methods of government that have been engendered on the neighboring island of Haiti are known to all intelligent Jamaicans, and they have never made much earnest effort to separate their portion of the Antilles from English control. They appreciate how much has been done, and is still being done for them by the religious people of England, and they are ready to believe that the ideals thus instilled into them are better than the teachings brought to Haiti from France and Spain. Once in a while a hot-headed young man—chafing against the strict enforcement of some law—comes into print and advocates the independence of Jamaica. His self-confidence is greatly lessened when some older man points him to the retrograde and bankrupt condition of Liberia, which, in its development and influence upon the “hinter land,” is now far below the hopes of Ashmun and other philanthropists, who did so much nearly one hundred years ago to give Liberia a good start.

No one can doubt that life means more to the negro when he is in some way associated with the white race, but whether his highest development is to be in South Africa, in the West Indies or in the United States is a question for the future to decide.